

SUPPLEMENT.

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HABITATIONS FOR THE WORKING CLASSES.

SIR,—The miserable accommodation, with some exceptions, the lot of the great majority of the working classes, induces me to submit for insertion in your valuable journal a few considerations on the subject.

There can be no doubt from the abundant evidence brought forward, that disease and death to an immense extent ensue from the filthy state of the houses of the poor, their defective accommodation, want of sewerage and ventilation.

Sir, if dirt in the atmosphere were visible, or could be rendered visible, as it is on our persons, our garments, and in our dwellings, it would astonish and appal the most apathetic. No one, not even the most degraded human being, willingly or knowingly, eats or drinks ordures, but ordures of the worst, most offensive and dangerous description, are continually inhaled into the lungs, when we respire impure, because unrenewed air. The physical constitution of the atmosphere, commonly only permits colourless substances to be drawn up into it. Such are the poisonous effluvia of small-pox, scarlet fever, typhous fever, and other infectious diseases. These effluvia are colourless, but irrespective of these, there are many other sorts, animal, vegetable, and mineral, alike destructive of life or of health, at all times circling in ill-renewed air, and more especially in the dwellings of the working-classes.

By means of a different and superior description of houses, all this might, in a great measure be prevented. It is not necessary to erect expensive dwellings, but they should be clean, light, cheerful, and with an invariable provision for the renewal of air. I hope to shew that houses of this superior description could be built, and yet afford an excellent return to those who might embark their capital therein. And I will add, that, while every scope should be given to individual humanity and enlightenment, it is the duty of the legislature to see that no more dens are erected, and that those which are unfit for human occupation, should be pulled down and reconstructed.

In towns, the necessity of the case, with the paucity and dearth of ground, will always render it necessary to construct dwelling on the top of dwelling, otherwise floor on the top of floor. In the country the case is different, and houses may be built according to the convenience and inclination of those concerned. I do not, however, think it is too much to say that throughout Great Britain and Ireland, the vast majority of human abodes are only fit to be pulled down.

In crowded localities it might be expedient to have flat roofs, covered with asphaltum or otherwise. Bordered with a cornice and railing or balustrade, or even a simple brick wall, they would prove rather ornamental than otherwise. The inclosed space would make a tolerable substitute for a playground, safe from the contamination and casualties of the streets, and in vastly purer air. It would also be easy to establish school-rooms and reading-rooms in a comparatively salubrious locality.

Houses for the working-classes should be of a substantial, permanent character, with Malm or iron joists, and walls impervious to moisture. The stairs and landings should be of stone, the balustrades iron, with a painted iron rail. After every consideration, I think it would be preferable to have iron joists and flagged or tiled floors, with the ground-floor somewhat elevated, of asphaltum. It would render the houses fire-proof, like those we observe in Paris, and further serve as a preventive of vermin. The loss accruing from the latter in the houses of the poor is very great.

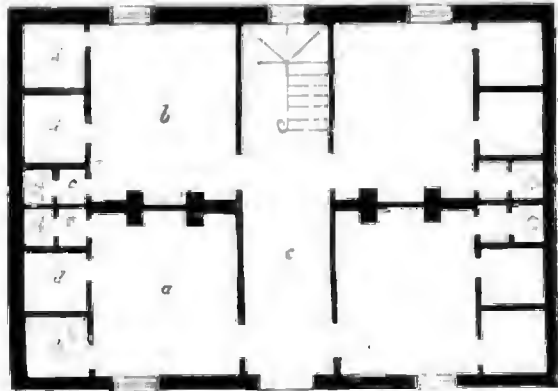
Neat and cheap window-frames of iron are now to be had of any dimensions, made to open in part, and with comparatively small panes, so as to save expense in breakage. The large portions of the window and door-posts, also the chimney-pieces, should be of stone or some hard composition. The apartments I would have not less than ten feet high. Less than this would not be enough, more would be perhaps superfluous. Each living room, as the late ingenious Mr. Loudon used to term it,

I would supply with a neat cooking range, with boiler, oven, and hot hearth, all kept up from the same fire. If the oven could be constructed of fire-brick it would perhaps be desirable. I have seen excellent and economical cooking-stoves in the Netherlands, but they are not perhaps adapted to the usages of these countries. Below the fire-place I would have a tray to pull out, and each fire-place should be supplied with an iron feeder. Above every boiler there should be a cold-water cock, supplied by a cistern in one of the upper corners of the apartment, or communicating with a cistern common to the whole range of dwellings. The loss of time, comfort, and even health, particularly during cold, wet weather, in having to send for water, sets very heavily on poor families. Over or beside the fire-place I would have one gas jet, and I would also light up the common passages, say till ten or eleven o'clock, when the gas might be turned off. Over the fire-place also, I think a hot chamber might be constructed large enough to admit a clothes horse.

The important matter of ventilation would be thoroughly secured by having at the period of the construction of the houses, flues built

into the walls contiguous to the chimney-flue. The best of the latter would create an effective draught through the former, and night and day the apartments would be thoroughly ventilated, better even than are the houses of the opulent, and that too, without any further care on the part of the occupants. It would probably be expedient to have a sliding valve, so as to regulate the amount of the draught. As for the outlet of the flues, I would have it within the passage between the coved ceiling and the roof, but if the roof were flat, air-conduits, with proper openings, might be left near the eaves or the chimney-stacks. The ventilating flues of all the apartments would open in the same direction, and the ventilation would be perfect. This mode of ventilation is in part that adopted by Mr. Walker. If his mode of heating could also be followed up, the process would be perfect.

In towns, the houses might be from two to four stories high. The latter elevation would be comparatively cheaper in the erection. For the same reason, if there was a suitable look out behind, I would have the houses double, extending backward, as well as laterally, as thus:—



If, however, the locality would not permit this, another arrangement would have to be adopted. The front elevation if of four stories, would be about 40 feet, allowing the basement floor to be a foot or so above ground. Four families would be accommodated on each floor. The arrangement is an 8 feet wide hall, (e) which would give plenty of air and scope to the inhabitants. Four doors opening from the hall and the landing-places on each floor, give access to four living rooms, (a b) one to each family, 12 feet by 14. From these rooms open two sleeping-closets (d) 5½ feet by 6, large enough to accommodate each, an iron bedstead 3 feet 6 inches broad, by 6 feet long, affording room for a chair, and a few pegs for clothes. There is also a third, or water-closet, (c) 3 feet by 6, to which there is access by two doors, the first enclosing a kind of vestibule, useful for maps, pails, brushes. A shaft communicating with the ventilating flue, should open from the top of the water-closet, by means of which and the addition of the double door no foul odours could escape, a consumption not always realized even in the best houses. The draught should be conveyed off, by means of iron tubes, to the main sewer. The contiguity of the water-closets of the different living apartments to each other, would render one main iron tube available for four distinct water-closets.

I cannot but think that this arrangement of the water-closets would be very desirable. Foul smells would be completely avoided, dirty slops would be rejected, while the convenience and decency as regards women and children, as well as invalids, would be obvious. Some, indeed, might condemn it, but surely on insufficient grounds. As it is, the limited existing houses of the poor are continually used, to say nothing of cases of illness, to satisfy the wants of nature in, to the great deterioration of the air and discomfort of the inmates. For meo, indeed, I would establish public necessities, sufficiently numerous to accommodate every locality.

The partitions between the living-rooms and sleeping-closets I would have six feet six inches high, except between the closets themselves, where I would continue the partition to the ceiling. By this arrangement, the air of the sleeping-closets would be equally well ven-

tilated with that of the living-room itself, while they would be sufficiently lighted up and warmed. Arrangements of no mean importance as regards health and comfort.

The partitions should be of brick, or some other fire-proof material, and in the corner of each apartment, I would have a stone bunker or box, for containing fuel. Spaces might be further left in the walls for shelves, for which slate would form a good and enduring material. The water that supplied the kitchen range might be derived from the same cistern that supplied the water-closets, or the rain-water might be accumulated in separate cisterns for the use of the latter. These cisterns, of course, would be supplied with overflow pipes. Each house, or block of houses, should be further provided with a lightning rod, which, according to the latest improvements, should communicate laterally with each mass of iron in the building.

I think the preceding details as regards habitations for the working-classes will be sufficient to illustrate my meaning. They would answer, I conceive, pretty well for most large towns. At the same time, if the principle were approved of, it would be open to any one to modify or improve upon it at pleasure. It will probably be conceded that the habitations here described would prove very much superior to the ordinary abodes of the working classes in any part of the three kingdoms. They would be at once warm, well-ventilated, comfortable, and convenient. The dimensions which I have stated are the smallest that could be given or economy dictate. If such buildings were undertaken, the dimensions and proportions might be conformable to the ideas of the projector. It strikes me that those which I have mentioned, would answer as well as any, and prove most suitable for families in humble circumstances.

The shelves, kitchen-ranges, iron-bedsteads, gas-fittings, should be fixtures, and it would further be desirable that a paid and responsible person appointed by the landlord, should see after the cleansing (daily) of halls and stairs, the lighting of passages, the safe keeping of the houses generally, the closing of outer doors at proper hours, the daily delivery of ashes and refuse, and the collection of the rents weekly in advance. All rates, taxes,